

Drought and the Central Valley Project in California

What's happening to California's water supply?

All indications are that 2009 will be California's third consecutive critically dry water year. Without substantial improvement to the anticipated water runoff in the next few months, the current drought may be the worst we have experienced in the last 90 years. Even with substantial rain and snowfall this spring, water supplies will be extremely limited as a result of the very low carryover storage in reservoirs throughout California.

Employees in the Department of the Interior, including Bureau of Reclamation and Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) personnel, are concerned about the human and environmental impact of this potentially record-breaking drought. We understand the impact our decisions and actions have on the State's people and economies each year, but this year in particular.

Federal, state, and local agencies are working together to respond to and mitigate this very difficult situation. Agency managers are and will continue to collaborate as they make the difficult decisions, within their authority, balancing competing beneficial uses of water.

What are our responsibilities?

Reclamation was authorized to build and operate the Central Valley Project last century for flood protection, water supply, primarily agricultural, and power production. In 1992, Congress added fish and wildlife as a co-equal purpose. The State Department of Water Resources (DWR) constructed the State Water Project for the purpose of water supply, primarily municipal.

Operations of these two large water projects are coordinated, and they are governed by water right permits issued by the State Water Resources Control Board, contract requirements, and numerous State and Federal laws, including the Endangered Species Acts.

What is being done?

Reclamation, DWR, FWS, and National Marine Fisheries Service, are consulting daily in preparation for the initial Central Valley Project water supply allocation to be announced February 20. We use the most recent hydrologic data along with sophisticated computer models of the complex operation of state and federal facilities and our contractual and environmental obligations to determine available water supply and develop operating criteria.

Reclamation is evaluating all options to meet obligations to senior water right holders and ensure we deliver enough water to meet public health and safety needs, while meeting legally mandated water quality and environmental requirements. Actions include:

- Changing the amount, timing, and location of water deliveries;
- Petitioning the State Water Resources Control Board to relax certain requirements as appropriate;
- Installing temporary pumps if permanent pumps are stranded;
- Facilitating transfers and exchanges;
- Permitting use of federal facilities to convey non-project water;

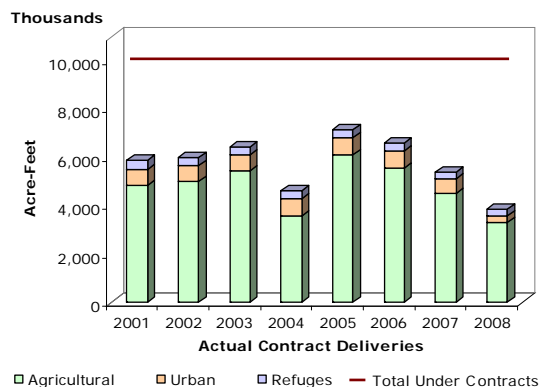


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Managing Water in the West

Water Districts, landowners, municipalities, resource managers, and others are also evaluating their options. The Department of the Interior will make every effort to support and facilitate actions directed toward efficient water management actions, consistent with federal and state water law.

Central Valley Project Water Contracts



How did we get in this situation?

Both the federal Central Valley Project and the State Water Project were designed and constructed to develop and manage water for human benefit. Over the years, and as society's values changed, additional purposes and demands were placed on these projects. Dedicating water for fish and wildlife purposes, increasing state population, resolution of Colorado River water allocations, and increasing

environmental regulatory requirements have reduced the available water supply and limited our operational discretion and flexibility. Also, during the past decade, many farmers shifted from annual crops to trees and vineyards, making it more difficult to fallow crops during a drought. While many orchards can be saved with well water for a short period, sustained pumping will result in a lower groundwater table in many areas.

Will the situation get better?

One thing is certain; California suffers and benefits from highly variable rain and snow fall from month to month and year to year. While March and April can be very wet months, we could experience another extremely dry spring like last year. As the water year progresses and the hydrologic outlook changes, we will update our water supply allocations accordingly.

Given that we have experienced droughts lasting 5-7 years since records have been kept in California, it is possible the drought could continue into the next and subsequent years. If it does, we will be faced with a very severe situation; if we experience a repeat of the 2006 water year, the water supply situation will improve though not completely.



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